

Origins of Croquet

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The origins of croquet are obscure and the articles referring to the origins of the game are vast and varied.

Golf and Croquet have a common ancestor in the Roman game of *Paganica*. A player in this game walked across fields and hit a small leather ball with a curved stick and aimed to strike certain trees. The winner was the person who hit all the trees in the fewest possible strokes. This sport developed in two ways. In country areas where there was adequate space, courses were laid out and the target became a hole. Thus the game of golf evolved. In towns where space was limited, the game of Pall Mall became popular. In this game, a box-wood ball, a foot in circumference, was played down an alley, passing through a number of arches or hoops on the way. The winner was the person achieving this in the fewest hits. This was the forerunner to croquet. It might be noted that the modern croquet ball is about a foot in circumference and is hit with a wooden mallet. (1 *Croquet Queensland*)

As far back as the fourteenth century peasants in Brittany and Southern France played a game called *Paille Maille*, a derivative of Latin words for ball and mallet, in which crude mallets were used to knock balls through hoops made of bent willow branches. This later became Pall Mall in England.

A game called *crooky* had been played in Ireland since the 1830's. It has been suggested that French nuns introduced the game to Ireland (2 Oxford Dictionary)

Pall Mall was introduced into Great Britain from France in the 17th Century by a group of Irish travellers who had seen it played in Brittany. It gave its name to the thoroughfares of *Pall Mall* and *The Mall*. (3 *Croquet Queensland*)

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'croquet' is a form of the word *croche*, an old North France word used to mean 'shepherd's crook'.

The oldest document to bear the word 'croquet' with a description of the modern game is the set of rules registered by Isaac Spratt in November 1856 in London.

(4 *Wikipedia*)

Widespread popularity came when a London sporting goods manufacturer, John Jaques, began selling complete croquet sets (John Jaques & sons remain the foremost manufacturer of croquet equipment today). With the availability of equipment croquet flourished and soon became one of the primary social and recreational activities of the British leisure class.

At first croquet was most popular among women. Given the nature of Victorian courting codes, it is not surprising that young people- particularly women- relished the game, which gave them the opportunity to socialize out of earshot of chaperones.(5 History of Croquet)

1868 saw the formation of the All England Club and in 1869 leased four acres of land in Wimbledon. Tennis and Croquet shared the facility and finally they separated and the Tennis Club purchased more land in Wimbledon where it is situated today.

In the 1870's croquet was introduced to the United States and was one of the first sports played there in which men and women competed with a similar handicap.

As was the case in England with the young women, it was a new experience for them to be able to play a game outdoors in the company of men. Early games of croquet were carefully chaperoned. 'Tight croquet', which was the practice of putting a foot on the ball and sending the opponent into the bushes, allowed the young men to go into the bushes with the young women to search for the ball. The game's popularity grew in the 1860's, where garden parties began to be called croquet parties. (Houston Croquet)

The same year croquet had reached virtually all of the British Colonies including Australia and New Zealand where it continued to gain recognition through the century. With the introduction of lawn tennis and the onset of World War I, the growth of croquet began to wane. By the 1930's and 1940's it enjoyed a resurgence.

At the start of the 21st century over 20 countries are members of the World Croquet Federation.

There are various forms of the game of croquet:

Association Croquet is the full international version of the sport which is played by the majority of tournament croquet players.

Golf Croquet is the fastest-growing version of the game, owing largely to its simplicity and competitiveness. There is an especially large interest with competitive success by players in Egypt. Golf croquet is easier to learn and play but requires strategic skills and accurate play. In comparison with Association croquet, play is faster and balls are more likely to be lifted off the ground.

Ricochet This version of the game was invented by John Riches of Adelaide, Australia with help from Tom Armstrong in the 1980s. The game can be played by up to 6 people and is very easy to learn.

Other forms of Croquet - There are variations on these forms of games such as garden croquet, gateball, extreme croquet and kick croquet (toequet).

Croquet in Australia

The earliest evidence of the game being played in Australia was advertisements in the Tasmanian '*Walch's Literal Intellegencer* in 1861 and photos of play at Government House in Perth in about 1863. Apart from the group based at Perth's Government House, the first croquet club was formed in Kyneton, Victoria in 1866 and a year later a club was formed at Kapunda, the then second largest town in South Australia. [*ACA Magazine*]

The years associations were formed in Australia are taken from a year book.

1910:	C.A.N.S.W.	Croquet Association OF New South Wales
1913:	W.A.C.A.	West Australian Croquet Association
Between 1915 and 1919:		Victorian Croquet Association
1921:	S.A.C.A.	S.A.C.A. South Australian Croquet Association and Tasmanian Croquet Association

1924: The W.A.C.A., which had been crossed off during the war, reappeared.

The West Australian Croquet Club is first mentioned in the 1912 year book but could be older, because the 1911 book is missing. It continued until at least 1915. The Western Australian Croquet Association appears in 1914 and 1915 as a separate organisation with different secretaries. From an Article by Max Hooper]

There are many early photographs of people playing croquet before associations were formed and the style of dress has changed dramatically over the years.



c1900. Young girls playing tennis in the foreground while women are playing croquet
in the background



c1901 Ladies playing croquet on the lawn of the Sons of Gwalia Mine Manger's House (WA) was very popular.